

**Shokushu #21 – Setsudo**  
**Friday, July 25, 2014**  
**C. Curtis**

Good evening everybody.

Tonight we are on our next to the last Shokushu, entitled *Setsudo*, the 21<sup>st</sup> Shokushu.

So let's start by reading the Shokushu as it is presented to us in the book:

*"Setsudo*

*Selfish people have never understood and traveled the way of the universe in the past. Therefore when we realize the principles and way of the universe, the universe gives us the responsibility to spread them to the world.*

*Do not think that you cannot help another. What you learn today, you can teach another the next day. The world is full of people who have lost the way of the universe and suffer from mental illness. Let us do our best to explain the correct principles of the universe to them."*

And then, Sayaka, would you please read it in Japanese for us? (Sayaka reads)

And now, I'll read you the translation from Sayaka and myself:

*"Teaching the Way*

*There is no selfish person who fulfills the way of the universe. If you awaken to the principles and way of the universe, you are given the responsibility, from the universe, to share them throughout the world.*

*Do not say that you don't have the strength to help people. If you have this experience one day, you are already a teacher for that experience. The world is full of people who are lost and suffering from an unhealthy mind. Let's share this awakening with others with all our hearts."*

Amazing, huh? As usual, the most difficult or challenging thing about the Shokushu, at least for those of us who speak English, is that it be presented in such a way that people don't take the relative meaning only from it. In other words, when we say "when you have this experience, automatically the universe gives you a responsibility to share it with the world" if you are not careful how you say that, then human beings, who always think they know the right way and are always more than willing to tell someone else what that right way is, will think that this has something to do with a moral injunction to spread your garbage on everybody else, like a politician. That's not what this is saying. You are not being given permission here, to do that.

We were very careful to take words like "the right way" and "the truth" out of it. Not that those are bad words necessarily, but easy to make that mistaken transfer. I mean, look at Facebook

these days. It's all filled with someone telling you how you ought to live your life. You are somewhere on a scale between meat-eating and vegetarian, or between accepting GMO and hating GMO, or between this kind of health medication and that kind of doctor or medication. You know, alternative this or that. Whatever it is, you being asked to take a position on a relative scale. And that's not what this is talking about. So don't think that this Shokushu gives us the responsibility to spread our opinion everywhere.

That's why, when you are teaching others, when you are sharing your experience of Aikido with others, always ask them not to believe you, but to please check it out in their own experience, so they can see for themselves if this works for them or not. It's not so much that it is true, but that it is something that you can experience. And if so, then it is useful for you. And if it isn't, you are free to ignore it.

Of course, if you keep training with the same teacher, he's going to tell you the same thing, "Try this, try this, try breathing every day," over and over. So if you keep rejecting it, you might as well not be training with that teacher. Because the only hope a student has, in training with some teacher, is to follow whatever guidance that teacher is offering.

So, as I say, the challenge is to word this in such a way that it is not so easy to use it to justify spreading your opinion to the world, but instead the emphasis is not just about telling someone else about your great wisdom, but actually discovering it for yourself with them.

OK?

*Student: So Sensei, I like the shift to "unhealthy minds" rather than "mental illness." In the twenty eight years I've been in this dojo, there's really only one person who I regarded as being mentally ill.*

Besides me, you mean.

*Student: No, you know we are healthy neurotics, but this person was actually mentally ill. And those people that suffer in that way are so lost that they don't even find themselves in the dojo.*

Yeah, I agree completely with the word use. And Sayaka made this observation. You know, she has been in medical school for awhile and she said that mental illness is like a formal disease, like paranoid schizophrenic. But with most of us, it's just a functioning neuroses.

*Student: You know, when I spoke to you on Wednesday and said that they were going to close the adolescent psychiatric unit, and you said to teach them Aikido, well there is a big continuum from healthy neurotic to mentally ill.*

OK, I stand corrected.

*Student: Yeah, I was struck by that too, and I think "unhealthy mind" can mean a lot of things. To me, this new translation speaks to wanting to live the example, not necessarily talking about*

*it, but living the awareness that you have. Whatever that might be. It could be an awareness about your spiritual connection to others, or it could be an awareness of something that's wrong in society that you want to stand up against. And I would say, for example, about that, there are people with unhealthy minds in our society that are very prejudiced, let's say, against someone of another race or very prejudiced against people who are homeless or something. And when you realize, and education is part of that, but education and experience and maturation gives you a way to become, to have a satori about that, then it's kind of like you need to stand up for it. It's just like, none of us would be silent if we heard someone harming a child or speaking horribly about someone because they were of another race. I think we would probably say something, maybe just "I don't agree with you. That's not right." You know, that, to me, is living that thing that we have been studying. Because it's like you are being an example of something for others.*

OK, thank you Mele. That's very interesting. Yeah. So that's taking it quite a bit further than I would. I say that, because it gets into a very murky area very quickly. For instance, with the examples that you give, like racism or harming a child or talking stink about a homeless person, I think pretty generally we can agree that we would all disagree with that. But not everybody does. It's a relative position on a scale. And you are not going to like this very much, but absolutely every position on every scale is justifiable from some perspective. It might not be mine or yours, but from some perspective, every position on every scale is justifiable. That's why there is a scale. That's why it's there. That's number one.

Number two, the second part that you go to from there is "so therefore we have a responsibility to stand up against that and speak against that or call that out and say 'that's not right, I don't agree with that.'" This is very different than what Tohei Sensei is saying here. Just bear with me, OK? I know that this is...I want you to understand, what I am saying here is, that's not what the Shokushu says. I am not saying your way of seeing how to live is somehow incorrect. Maybe I even agree with you in some ways. But that's not what this says. And when I began by saying that Sayaka and I tried very hard to pick words that didn't point to a moral, relativistic choice that we are trying to convince someone else of or trying to share with someone else. This is in fact an experience of universality, and we are trying to share that experience itself, not an extension of that to an idea about that. That's very hard to stay with because it seems like it's such a small leap to what you are saying, that we should therefore use what we have "realized." And that's why I didn't use that word "realized" but only "awakened to." But even that word, as all words, can be used relatively or absolutely also. That's why we have spent a long time on that particular phrase, wondering what's the best way to say this so nobody thinks, "Oh he's talking about standing against something, or calling out something in the relative world," which is not what we are talking about.

*Student: Um, what I wanted to say that I didn't make very clear was, to me, that part about...can I look at the paper a minute? "Do not say that you don't have the strength to help people." A lot of people feel like they don't have the strength to help others, like "there's a lot of things I'd like to do in this world, but I don't have that strength." To me, this is speaking to the*

*fact that, for example, there have been people in this world that have just had the realization that they can do something. Let's say, what if Martin Luther King or Gandhi had never had the realization that they could do something, like Sojourner Truth, people who really made a difference because they had something within themselves that said, "I can do this. I can do something to help another." And, to me, I've always felt that Aikido kind of gives you that feeling, when you realize what "extend Ki" is, that you can say and feel and believe and act, that "Yes, there is something that I can do." That's why I really like this new translation because it says that to me.*

Yeah, I hear you. That's great, and that's easy to accept and agree with. The wonderful thing about Aikido and learning to extend Ki, is that blockage that you are talking about falls away, and you find yourself with confidence to move into anything that requires moving into. In some case it might be this, in another case it might be something else. You are right, that's the wonderful thing about Aikido.

You know, this business is the whole of the universe, awakening to and following the way of the universe. This is freedom, freedom from limitation. And we don't even know what limitations might be there holding us back, until we see them for the first time in our self. Sometimes it might be because someone points something out, but most likely we come upon it. We grow, we mature enough, and then "Oh, wait a minute. Why am I acting on a belief? What's a deeper, more profound way for me to interact with my fellow human beings?" And then that motivates us, inspires us to practice, to train, so that we can be a better friend, a better support, a better spouse, a better parent, whatever that might mean.

You know, I've had people say to me, people that knew someone...well, like with a parent. I'm thinking right now of a person that has trained Aikido for a number of years and the father saw me one day and said, "You know, I would never train Aikido, but my son is a different human being since he has been training with you. You saved him." "Well," I said, "I didn't save him. Aikido and his own awakening changed him." "Well, I just wanted to tell you," he said. So here is someone who recognizes it enough to honor me by saying those nice things, that supportive talk, but he wanted to be sure that I understood he would never do it. It's no one's Dad here in this room.

*Student: Sensei, you know I've never really liked this Shokushu, only because it sounded like a recruiting tool of some sort. And I think a lot of people may have thought that Tohei Sensei wrote this because he had to go out and spread Aikido to Europe, the U.S. and all that. But I've always thought of Setsudo more of the way Suzuki Sensei practiced it. He didn't really advertise. He didn't really put himself out there, "Come train with me." But he was ready to teach anyone who wanted to train. If you really wanted to train, he would teach you. And that's kind of how I have always seen it. And the way you changed the last part of it is very different than what it says in the Shokushu book. How was that? I mean, was it difficult to change that last paragraph?*

Yeah. Important and difficult. So, the last paragraph is, "The world is full of people who are lost and suffer from an unhealthy mind. Let's share this awakening with others with all our hearts." It literally says, "Let's teach and explain the right way to people with our whole effort." Do you like that?

*Student: No, not at all!*

Yeah, no. So, that's the literal wording, but we have learned that you don't use the literal wording quite like you might think, because those words are the translated words in English. But those words in Japanese that Sayaka translates literally as that, don't mean that to the Japanese speaker! So we have to somehow capture the same meaning, like in poetry, and write it so that you have the feeling that the Japanese people feel when they read that in Japanese. So that's our task. It's challenging, and I must admit, which you all probably know already, I have experienced the way of the universe in the way that I have. And I am the teacher here, so I tend to share it in that way. I'm quite sure that none of you share it exactly the way I do. You are all teachers also.

I'm not sure I even need to say that. It's self-evident. Maybe I'm just letting you know that I am aware of that, that of course this comes out of my experience. I do always ask Sayaka, "Do you think that's OK? Can you live with that?" And when she says, "Oh yeah, that's good," then OK. Sometimes she will wrinkle up her nose and say "No, I don't think so." Then I have to look some more for a different way to say it.

*Student: Sensei, I asked you once before if you were ever going to have a conversation with Shinichi Tohei Sensei about what you are doing.*

Sayaka asked me that tonight. Well, actually what she said is, "Do you think Shinichi Sensei is aware of how off the English is relative to the Japanese?" Because he is speaking more and more, better and better English now, and at some point he might notice. But he might not get the implications of using a word like "realize," for instance, which doesn't really mean what the person who wrote it meant it to mean. It is just too easy to misinterpret or misuse that word.

What this Shokushu is talking about is definitely not to be sharing an opinion of yours or of mine with anyone. An opinion is something on a relative scale. You are taking a position on a relative scale. Therefore that is your opinion, and that's it. The only truth there is the whole thing all put together, everything included. That's the truth. There are no positions, on any scale, that you can claim as truth. That's opinion. It is not saying to share your opinion with us. It is saying, have this experience of the way of the universe, which is a profound, intimate, transformational experience that happens at a certain point, and again and again, in your practice. The first level of it happens on the first night. So if you can limit yourself to sharing that, the next day, that's great.

It is surprising how many people with opinions who think they know the truth.

*Student: I have two questions. If I am teaching the way Curtis Sensei teaches, this is Aikido as I have learned it from Curtis Sensei, so where am I on this?*

You are asking me? You know, when Suzuki Sensei first asked me to teach for him, I tried my best to teach exactly the way Suzuki Sensei taught, even using his language. I tried to talk like him, and wanted to move like him, and I gave the lessons the way he gave the lessons. And finally one day Larry Shishido Sensei, who was an old time 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Dan sitting in the back of the dojo, called me over after the class and said, "That was a very good class. I see that you understand Suzuki Sensei's teaching. When are we going to hear your teaching?" And then, not too long after that, I met another teacher, from another school, who basically said the same thing to me. I told him something about an experience of awakening that I had had, and he said, "So you've shared this with your students?" And I said, "Oh, no, no. I only teach what my teacher teaches." And he said, "Oh, I don't understand. You should be sharing this with your students. This is your true experience. This is your awakening experience."

So then my teaching began to change. And now you ask me about teaching the way I teach. But you didn't say teaching the way Suzuki Sensei taught, so obviously I am not teaching that way any more, even though I still consider him my teacher. I feel like he is sitting right here on my shoulder all the time. So, in some sense he is always here. I feel that very strongly, and yet I know that I don't teach like he taught. He used to sit in his office, or even come out on the bench while I was teaching. And then afterward I would go in the office. And I knew that I was now starting to teach from my heart instead of trying to copy him, and I would always ask if my teaching was OK. And he would say, "Yes, this is the way you should teach." He never said that I should teach just like him. He was always much more confident in me than I was in me, and that helped me no end in trusting myself.

Some of this is very personal, and very intimate, and it is not always easy, even for someone as extraverted as me, and maybe in some ways particularly for someone like me, to share the deepest sort of experience. But it is quite necessary if you want to teach. If you want to help others you can't be moralizing. I used to be the "Breathing Nazi." That's moralizing. That's not teaching. That's beating people over the head with what they should be doing. You know, "You must breathe one hour every day. How long did you breathe this morning?" In some sense Suzuki Sensei did that, but maybe it wasn't like what I did. Anyway, I always thought he was a kind of Nazi about that kind of thing. Only he would carry a little notebook around where he wrote down every day exactly how many hours he breathed, and would show it to me, just to crush me that I couldn't possibly keep up with him.

You said you had two questions. Do you remember what the other one is?

*Student: Yes. I am wondering if you can address the character of this obligation that this Shokushu speaks to just a little bit more?*

Yes, "the universe gives us the responsibility to share with others." I want to say that it's automatic, but at the same time I want to emphasize that it's not what Christians might call

“witnessing.” You know, it doesn’t mean to trumpet it to the world. I think Tracy made a good point about Suzuki Sensei. He was not out there advertising himself. He made it almost impossible for me to even put the dojo address in the phone book under the correct name. But to anybody who wanted to learn about his experience, he was very open and free and happy to share. So I think that’s a caveat that is important here.

I said it’s “automatic.” This thing that Tohei Sensei is talking about, this responsibility, and when it becomes a part of you. That’s why we said, “if you have this experience this day, you are already a teacher of that experience.” In other words, you are already doing that since it is a part of you now. The biggest responsibility a teacher, a Sensei, has, is to be an example to the student. To show that it can be done. All this training that we do, it can awaken an individual. And so once you’ve had an experience like this, it is an integral part of your being. And I might even go so far as to say that if you don’t acknowledge that in your interaction with other human beings, you might expect it to be withdrawn. I have had that experience too. It’s like trying to cling to something and keep it for yourself, and repeat it and repeat it. That’s not how it is. It’s a natural out-flowing. That why, when you are taking a Ki Test, I say “Don’t look so serious. It’s OK to smile.” This is a natural thing. It’s our original condition.

So at the same time that the Shokushu book makes it sound like some incredible experience, which it is, it is our natural condition. It’s not something weird or out there. It’s just being natural.

*Sensei: Not being selfish?*

No. It’s not being selfish, at the very least. Clinging to it would be considered to be selfish. Is this what you mean? Yes, “selfish people have never understood...” The selfish part of our self can’t have this experience.

*Sensei: Sensei, further along this line of discussion...well, what I want to ask about is that I have read lots of accounts of people that have awakened and don’t choose to become teachers and share their experience. They may just sit in a cave in the Himalayas, or they may be wandering the streets. So I am just wondering about this thing of responsibility. I mean for someone who has this, are they compelled to share it, or not?*

Well, yeah, I too have read all those tales, those books, and heard about all different kinds of people like this all over the world, and of course, not all of them are teachers. But all of them, there is a story about. OK? And maybe it could be a homeless person, and maybe they are not out there teaching the people on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, but they are interacting with and sharing their life with other homeless people. And as such, that’s their mission. And maybe the person stays a monk all of his life, but those monks need an example. Like the Roshi ...oh I’m so bad with names. But anyway, it doesn’t matter which Roshi, there have been many awakened beings that stayed in the monastic life and just served the clientele there. That didn’t work for me in this lifetime. I was directed by my teacher not to do that, but to be in public. But I am sure it takes all kinds, and there is probably someone having this experience in every walk of life,

somewhere.

I read a great story about a guy that was being tortured in a Japanese internment camp in World War II. He was writing about it himself, though I can't remember the name of the book. And he had an awakening, right there. So instead of breaking him, they freed him. But of course they didn't free him on purpose, and they certainly didn't let his body go. It happened because he was ready. So it can be in all kinds of strange situations, not just in Aikido or not just in a monastery. Tohei Sensei is saying all this, because we are his Aikido students, and I too am sharing it with you because you are my Aikido students.

In this sense we have a venue here where we can do this, this dojo. So whoever walks into this dojo we can open our hearts to them and share what we experience with them. But this is not at all to say that this is the only way.

OK, thank you very much everybody.